

[0032] FIG. 10 is a schematic representation, in perspective view, of another exemplary gaming device by which the reel type embodiment of the inventive method, depicted in FIGS. 8 and 9, may be effected; and

[0033] FIG. 11 is a schematic representation of a gaming system incorporating teachings of the present invention.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

[0034] The flow chart of FIG. 1, along with FIGS. 2 and 3, illustrate a broad, exemplary aspect of the gaming method of the present invention. In the gaming method, a player initiates a primary game, at reference character 10 of FIG. 1 and as shown in FIG. 2, by selecting one or more paylines 34 on an array 30 of image sites 32. As depicted in FIG. 2, there are nine different paylines 34, identified for clarity by various broken lines, across array 30, each including five image sites 32. While a 3x5 rectangular array is depicted, arrays with different numbers of symbols and of other arrangements are also within the scope of the present invention. Once the desired paylines 34, which are referred to herein as "selected" paylines 35, have been chosen by the player, a symbol 36 from a predetermined set of symbols is randomly generated and displayed at each image site 32 of array 30, as shown at reference character 12 of FIG. 1. The symbols 36 along each selected payline 35 may be fixed at the initial display or the player may be provided with an opportunity to have symbols 36 at one or more image sites 32 along one or more selected paylines 35 randomly replaced with different or other symbols 36 from the predetermined set.

[0035] At reference character 14, each symbol 36 along each selected payline 35 is examined to determine whether the player should receive a predetermined award. If a winning combination of symbols 36 is present on a given payline, process flows to reference character 16 of FIG. 1, where the player may receive an award based upon the particular winning combination of symbols 36. Exemplary awards include, but are not limited to, cash, monetary credits, tournament qualification points, or tournament points. An award for the presence of a certain combination of symbols 36 on a selected payline 35 may be granted immediately or withheld until a determination is made as to whether the payline qualifies the player for a bonus round or until a bonus round, if awarded, is complete.

[0036] Next, at reference character 18 of FIG. 1, each selected payline 35 is "examined" for the presence of an established trigger symbol 36T (FIG. 2) or other bonus round triggering event, such as one or more predetermined triggering combinations of symbols 36 thereon. If trigger symbol 36T is present along any selected payline 35 or another triggering event occurs, play proceeds to a bonus round, at reference character 20 of FIG. 1. Alternatively, for the possibility of receiving a substantially increased award, the player may be provided with the opportunity to proceed to the bonus round in lieu of receiving an award based on the combination of symbols 36 present (e.g., by wagering the primary game award for the corresponding selected paylines 35) along each selected payline 35 in which trigger symbol 36T is present or in which another triggering event occurs.

[0037] In the bonus round, an exemplary embodiment of which is depicted in FIG. 3, play continues along a single bonus payline 38. As will be discussed hereinafter in further

detail, none, one or more symbols 36 from the selected payline 35 in the primary game that qualified the player for the bonus round may be retained in bonus payline 38, while at least one symbol 36 from selected payline 35 is replaced, through random generation, with another symbol from the predetermined set or from a "fresh" set of symbols 36, which preferably includes the same symbols 36 as the predetermined set. As an alternative, a different set of symbols may be used in the bonus round, such as the symbols typically associated with a slot machine or other reel type game. Bonus payline 38 is examined, in a similar manner as that in which each selected payline 35 is examined, to determine whether or not a "winning" combination of symbols 36 is present thereon. If so, the player may be granted a bonus award in addition to or in lieu of any award based on the results of the primary game, or the award from the primary game may be increased. The amount of the bonus award or the amount of the award increase that occurs as a result of the bonus game is preferably based on the results of the bonus game.

[0038] At reference character 22 of FIG. 1, a determination is made as to whether trigger symbol 36T is present at a specified image site within array 30, which is referred to herein as trigger site 32T. If so, at reference character 24 of FIG. 1, a bonus event may occur automatically, or the player may decide to proceed to a bonus event in lieu of an award based on the results of the primary game. The bonus event may include a bonus round of play, as described with reference to both FIG. 3 and reference character 20 of FIG. 1, or an increase of an award based on results of one or both of the primary game and any bonus games. This bonus event may be granted even if trigger site 32T in which trigger symbol 36T appears is not located in a selected payline 35.

[0039] While the flow chart of FIG. 1 illustrates the elements of the inventive method in a particular, exemplary order, any order of execution that is suitable for effecting the broadest aspects of the method of the present invention is within the scope of the present invention.

[0040] FIGS. 4-10 depict specific, exemplary embodiments of the methods and gaming devices of the present invention. In one exemplary embodiment of a method incorporating teachings of the present invention, illustrated in FIGS. 4-6, the predetermined set of symbols 36 includes one of each card 36' of a deck of playing cards (e.g., poker cards), with each card 36' comprising a different symbol 36. In the example of a deck of poker cards, the number of symbols 36 in the predetermined set may be fifty-two different symbols 36, or cards 36', if no jokers or other "wild cards" are included, or one additional symbol 36 for each joker or other wild card included in the deck.

[0041] As illustrated in FIG. 4, the primary game is in the form of single deck stud poker, although the primary game may, alternatively, be draw poker. The displayed array 30 includes three rows 31 of image sites 32, each row including five image sites 32. As shown, a player can select from one or more of fifteen different paylines 34, each of which includes five image sites 32, although variations of this embodiment could include different numbers of available paylines 34 with different paths through array 30 of image sites 32. The one or more paylines 34 are selected as known in the art, such as by wagering, or betting, at least a fixed minimum amount of money credits (e.g., one credit) or